

the first to compliment him for it. It comes right down to the Constitution itself and, in many respects, I believe the most important provision in the Constitution. Religious liberty is something that our early leaders risked their lives to obtain because they were persecuted because of their religious beliefs.

I call on the President of the United States to change this, to acknowledge that this is a mistake, and to understand that we are united—Democrats, Republicans, Independents, and others—in the protection of this great liberty.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN of Ohio). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

MOVING AHEAD FOR PROGRESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1813, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 311, S. 1813, a bill to reauthorize Federal-aid highway and highway safety construction programs, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California is recognized.

Mrs. BOXER. Well, Mr. President, this is a big day for those of us who believe strongly that we need to focus on job creation, a better business climate, a bill that will, in fact, not only protect jobs but create new jobs. That is the bill we are hoping will get the go-ahead at 2 o'clock, what we call MAP-21, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, S. 1813.

This has been—if I could use an analogy that fits—a long road to get to this point so we can, in fact, make sure we have an adequate road system, an adequate highway system, an adequate transit system, and that we make sure, as a world leader, our infrastructure—our bridges, our roads—keep up with the demands put upon them. There are many demands put upon them because we are a great nation with commerce and heavy-duty vehicles on our roadways and railroads that cross over roadways that create potential problems, and, certainly, we have a robust transit system that needs to keep up with the times.

Last night, I received a letter from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and I was very pleased to see it because they support the bill Senator INHOFE and I, on a bipartisan basis, were able to get through our committee on a unanimous vote.

It is a rare moment in history, frankly, when the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and labor unions all come together, with everyone on the same page, to say: Let's move forward with a bill. In these days of controversy and debate—and, Lord knows, I am immersed in many of them—this is one where we have been able to carve out a very important consensus, not only in the Environment and Public Works Committee but in the Banking Committee—where Senators JOHNSON and SHELBY work together—to get a piece of this bill done.

In the Finance Committee—where Senators there are led by Senator BAUCUS—they were able to hammer out a tough and important agreement to fund this bill because it has some shortfalls due to the fact that the highway trust fund has been going down because cars are getting better fuel economy—and that is a good thing—but the bad, unintended problem is the trust fund now has fewer dollars, so we run short of what we need to keep our bridges and highways and transit systems going.

So what a moment it was to see not only our committee but the Banking Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Commerce Committee, with a couple of exceptions on a couple of provisions—they did their job as well, and we are trying to work with them to resolve whatever matters remain in that portion of the bill.

But I want to quote from the letter from the Chamber of Commerce that I received last night. I want to share a couple lines with everyone. I am quoting:

The Chamber strongly supports this important legislation. Investment in transportation has proven to grow jobs, and the need for Congress to act on transportation infrastructure is clear.

Another quote:

Passing transportation reauthorization legislation is a specific action Congress and the Administration can take right now to support job growth and economic productivity without adding to the deficit.

Those two quotes I think show we have done our job well.

This is a bill that is paid for. This is a bill that, because of the way it was written, is a reform bill, which I will go into. But it also protects the jobs we currently have, which is 1.8 million jobs in the transportation area, and also, because of the way we have boosted a program called TIFIA—which I will talk about, which is a highly leveraged program—we have the capacity to add over a million new jobs. Mostly these jobs are in the private sector. That is where they are, and that is what we are focused on in this legislation.

I mentioned Senator INHOFE before, my ranking member on the Environment and Public Works Committee. I expect him to be in the Chamber shortly. I cannot tell you of the trusted partnership we were able to develop with him that went not only for his relationship with me in working on this bill, but the staff-to-staff relationships which have blossomed into friendships and trust. I think what we have shown is that each of us can be a tough but fair partner. Our staffs understand where we are coming from. But we have a bigger goal in front of us than our differences; that is, our agreement that it is our responsibility to fix our aging roads and highways and bridges—our infrastructure—to put people back to work, to boost our economy, and, as Senator INHOFE has talked about very often, with examples that are in many ways heart breaking, we have problems with safety in our Nation. We have bridges that are crumbling. We have seen them with our own eyes. We cannot turn away from this because we may have disagreements on lots of other things.

It has been a long but a very worthwhile journey to get to this stage because the payoff here, if this bill eventually becomes law, is, as I said, protecting 1.8 million jobs and creating up to another million jobs.

Again, I want to mention the Commerce Committee. I did not thank Senators ROCKEFELLER and HUTCHISON for their work on this as well. So we have four committees that are involved in writing this bill. Each committee has voted out their bills. If all goes right today, and we get a resounding go-ahead, I hope we begin with amendments on the EPW portion, and then move to add the different other bills to this bill, until we have added all four—all the committees together—and then I hope we will have a resounding vote and get to a conference committee. We have major differences with the other body, but I think we can work them out for the good of the people and the thousand organizations that back us in this bill, in this effort.

I also have to thank Senator HARRY REID, the majority leader. He brought this bill to the floor. He exerted the right kind of pressure on all of our committees. He encouraged us. He understands clearly that, as we try to get out of this recession—and we have seen beneficial results from our actions in a number of areas—this is going to mean a big boost for jobs.

I want to also say that within my committee we have what we call the big four: it is the chairman and the ranking member—myself and Senator INHOFE—and then it is the chairman of the Highway Subcommittee and the ranking member there; and that is Senator BAUCUS and Senator VITTER. So I honestly think if you look at the big four, and you look at our philosophies, and you look at where we are from and the differences we bring to the table, we cover the whole Senate in terms of